



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION: Fire Service College

ADDRESS: Moreton-in-Marsh
Gloucestershire
GL56 0RH

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Jez Smith, Managing Director

Accreditation status: Accredited

Date of inspection: 17 June 2015

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: 10th September 2015

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Fire Service College Ltd (the College) was established in 1974 and is the premier fire training and education centre in Europe, with an international reputation. It undertakes training for fire and rescue services, commercial delegates in the UK and an increasing number of delegates from overseas. The College was run as a trading fund executive agency within the Department for Communities and Local Government until February 2013, when it was privatised. It is now a limited company owned by Capita.

The College is overseen by a College Management Board comprising a senior firefighter, representatives of the Chief Fire Officers Association and Local Government Association, the Managing Director and a Capita representative. The Board determines strategy. The Customer Advisory Board, which advises the Management Board, comprises about 12 people including representatives of Welsh and Scottish Assemblies, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Chief Fire Officers Association. Capita oversees investment and determines aspects of financial, human resources and business operations.

The College operates on a 365 acre site on the edge of Moreton-in-Marsh with extensive buildings including teaching accommodation, laboratories, delegate accommodation blocks, cafeteria, social facilities, gym, swimming pool, sports facilities, a multi-faith centre and administrative offices. A real strength of the College is the incident ground used for experiential learning. This very large area comprises buildings, aircraft, helicopters, motorway, railway, and various other settings where a series of scenarios and accidents can be recreated.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The College has a permanent administrative and ancillary staff, numbering about 150 in total, and a core staff of ten teachers, supplemented by temporary employed tutors and around 150 self-employed associate tutors.

Since the acquisition by Capita, significant changes have taken place as part of a project to transform the College to best meet the needs of its delegates. Considerable investment has taken place in maintaining and improving the College with the provision of new and refurbishment of existing buildings. New managers have been introduced and a more commercial approach has been adopted. The IT systems are being replaced. Human resource management is now undertaken off site.

The curriculum has been reviewed and some courses have been compressed from four and a half days to three longer days.

The College operates over 200 short courses varying in duration, with all but a few being less than six weeks. There are approximately 4500 short course enrolments each year, with sole delegates undertaking a number of short courses, and some completing a combination of courses to achieve an HND, diploma or degree. When forming part of a recognised academic qualification the knowledge base and assessment of the course is enhanced.

Approximately 370 overseas delegates attend full-time courses of longer duration, up to two years, on short-term study or general/business visas.

All of the students at the College are sponsored by their organisation. These vary from UK fire brigades to overseas fire authorities and private companies (e.g. Kuwait National Petroleum). Approximately two thirds of delegates and income are from UK organisations, with the remaining third from overseas. There are students from Europe and the majority of the overseas students come from the Middle East and the Caribbean.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector in an afternoon visit. The inspector met with the Managing Director, Finance Director, Head of Business Development, Head of Customer Services and the Quality Assurance Officer. He also spoke by conference phone call with the Functional Lead – International/Commercial, and School of Industrial Safety.

4. Inspection history

Full accreditation inspection: 30 and 31 March 2009

Interim inspection: 16 June 2010

Full accreditation inspection 8 and 9 October 2013

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

There have been a number of changes in personnel and positions at senior management level.

Refurbishment of premises has continued since the last inspection, with a concentration on facilities used by delegates. All classrooms are in the process of refurbishment. A new residential accommodation block with 100 beds was opened in June 2014. It was reported that investment of £17m has been made since acquisition by Capita.

The College is looking to develop longer term relationships with its overseas partners, who would like to move towards providing a greater proportion of training in-house, reducing costs compared with training in the UK. There is therefore a shift towards “train the trainer” programmes in international work.

Work has continued on the rationalisation of courses and to ensure greater consistency of quality. An external project team was brought in to initiate the course review process, which has been accompanied by professional development of tutors. The format and presentation of courses have been revised to ensure such consistency. At the time of the last inspection, many courses had been reduced in length from four and a half days to three days. Delegate feedback has led to the reinstatement of the four and a half day option for some courses, with some courses being offered in both formats.

Professional development of tutors has been reviewed. Initially this was organised through the Training Accreditation Programme, but latterly this has been replaced by the PTLTS (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) qualification. An Instructors' Assurance Programme has been introduced.

Work has been undertaken on e-learning courses including preparatory elements for residential courses. Simulation software has been developed to provide experience of simulated incidents and scenarios for use in training. In the latter, the delegate interacts with the scenario and his/her actions are monitored.

The volume of international business has increased. Some of the courses for international delegates continue to be taught in English but since summer 2013, some have been bilingual, with the use of interpreters sourced through a sister Capita company.

2. Response to action points in last report

Required actions

The College should ensure that the English preparation course, undertaken before delegates from overseas attend the two year diploma course, includes appropriate reference to terminology related to the fire service. The English preparation course lasts nine months and is provided by Gloucestershire College in Cheltenham. During this course delegates are now provided with a new glossary of technical terms produced about a year ago to address the identified need.

Language support during the course at the College has been enhanced. Teaching materials for initial courses at the College are produced bilingually. An eight week course in technical English takes place prior to the start of the two year diploma course, during which some English language support is provided, particularly in report writing.

The actions taken by the College address the action required.

Delegates must be advised of BAC's complaints procedure.

The International Delegates Portfolio is being revised, and reference to the BAC complaints procedure will be included here.

The College must complete the work on placing fire evacuation notices in all classrooms.

It was reported that fire evacuation notices were fitted shortly after the last inspection. Full refurbishment of all teaching rooms is currently underway. This is being completed in accordance with formal project standards and procedures, which include provision of fire evacuation signage.

Recommendations

Encourage the use of more directed oral questioning to assess learning in lessons

It was pointed out that the teaching observed in the last inspection was a small sample and that the College's courses include a variety of teaching situations in addition to classroom lecture-type sessions. There are highly interactive practical sessions, and sessions which focus on discussion and group work. The newly devised simulation and e-learning exercises require all delegates to respond, and for individual learning to be assessed. The professional development of tutors, including through the PTLTS course, includes work on learning checks. The College agreed to ensure this recommendation was borne in mind in professional training work.

Improve the quality of the food provided for overseas delegates

Catering is provided by an external company under a Catering Manager, overseen by the College's Head of Customer Services. Considerable effort is made by both the catering company and the College to elicit constructive feedback from overseas delegates on food provided. This is obtained by written questionnaires, interviews and more informal contacts. The Head of Customer Services and Catering Manager review feedback at their meetings, and agreed actions form part of the Catering Improvement Plan.

Changes in provision have been made to improve quality of dishes. Longer stay delegates on some courses have access to kitchen facilities and are provided with some raw materials to cook for themselves. Long-stay delegates may also eat in the staff facility (paying themselves) offering additional options.

The inspector formed the impression that the College was very serious about producing food to the tastes of the delegates.

3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				

3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				

3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				

3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Institution's strengths

The College is evidently committed to quality improvement in all areas.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None	

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	